

The use of children of living parents in ritual may be explained by a notion that they are fuller of life and therefor e luckier than orphans .

higher degree of vitality than an orphan probably explains all the cases of the 'employment of such a child in ritual, whether the particular rite is designed to ensure the fertility of the ground or the fruitfulness of women, or to avert the danger of death and other calamities. Yet it might be a mistake to suppose that this notion is always clearly apprehended by the persons who practise the customs. In their minds the definite conception of super-abundant and overflowing vitality may easily dissolve into a vague idea that the child of living parents is luckier than other folk. No more than this seems to be at the bottom of the Masai rule that when the warriors wish to select a chief, they must choose "a man whose parents are still living, who owns cattle and has never killed anybody, whose parents are not blind, and who himself has not a discoloured eye,"<sup>1</sup> And nothing more is needed to explain the ancient Greek custom which assigned the duty of drawing lots from an urn to a boy under puberty whose father and mother were both in life.<sup>2</sup> At Athens it would appear that registers of these boys were kept, perhaps in order that the lads might discharge, as occasion arose, those offices of religion which required the service of such auspicious youths.<sup>3</sup> The atrocious tyrant Heliogabalus, one of the worst monsters who ever disgraced the human form, caused search to be made throughout Italy for noble and handsome boys whose parents were both alive, and he sacrificed them to his barbarous gods, torturing them first and grabbing among their entrails afterwards for omens. He seems to have thought that such victims would be peculiarly acceptable to the Syrian deities whom he worshipped; so he encouraged the torturers and butchers at their work, and thanked the gods for enabling him to ferret out "their friends." <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A. C. Hollis, *The Masai* (Oxford, 1905), p. 299.

<sup>2</sup> Lucian, *Hermotimtus* 57.

<sup>3</sup> A fragmentary list of these youths

is preserved in an Athenian inscription of the year 91 or 90 B.C. See Ch. Michel, *Recueil d'Inscriptions*

*Grecques*, Supplement, i. (Paris,  
1912)  
p. 104, No. 1544.  
<sup>4</sup> Aelius Lampridius,  
*Antoninus*  
*Heliogabalus* ^ viii. I sq. The  
historian  
thinks that the monster chose  
these  
victims merely for the pleasure  
of  
rending the hearts of both the  
parents.